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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1990s, the majority of school-aged children in Texas have been non-White. The 1995 Texas legislature authorized the use of cumulative voting in school districts as a result of lawsuits prompted by the underrepresentation of minority groups on school boards. In cumulative voting, each voter has a number of votes equal to the number of positions to be filled at the election. Voters may concentrate their votes on a single candidate or distribute them among all candidates as desired. Communities are thus able to retain election at-large for school board members, while improving opportunities for minority representation. Interviews were conducted with superintendents and board members in four rural and small school districts that recently introduced cumulative voting. The districts were Central Texas Consolidated Independent School District, Salt Independent School District, and Double Mountain Independent School District in Texas, and Lee Municipal School District in eastern New Mexico. The districts had minority enrollments of 44-72 percent, primarily Hispanic students. The interviews revealed that although cumulative voting was preferred, it has had limited impact on the ethnic composition of school boards; minority board members quickly became integrated into the board; with the exception of a few identifiable minority issues, minority board members viewed board issues from a community perspective; and cumulative voting has not improved interracial and interethnic relations. It is too early to say what the long-term impact, if any, of cumulative voting will be. Contains 14 references. (TD)

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The Impact of Cumulative Voting on Four Small Rural School Districts

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The Impact of Cumulative Voting on Four Small Rural School Districts

Changing demographics in rural Texas. In the spring of 1995 sixteen political entities in Texas, including eight public school districts, were required to change the manner in which they selected members of their governing boards. This change in selection procedures was the result of suits bought by local citizens under the Federal Voting Rights Act and were prompted in large part by the exclusion of minority representatives from governing boards. With one exception, all of the public school districts effected by the suits were small and rural. The inclusion of small rural school districts in voting rights litigation is a consequence of the changing demographics of rural Texas.

Texas has undergone rapid changes in the composition of its population. The proportion of African American, Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans has grown steadily. Since the early 1990's, nonwhite students have made up the majority of school aged children in the state. The increase in minority students has been rapid, due mostly to the twin factors of high birth rates and immigration. In the past, the impact of demographic change has fallen most heavily on communities in the Rio Grande Valley and on the metropolitan centers of the state. Teachers and administrators in urban school districts long ago learned to accommodate the needs of students from a multiplicity of cultures, speaking a number of non-English primary languages. It is only recently that rural and small school educators have had to begin making the same types of adjustments as the numbers of nonwhite and non-English speaking students in their classrooms grows.

Rural and small school districts make up nearly seventy-nine percent of the school districts in Texas---824 of the 1045 operating school districts enroll fewer than 3,000 students; 365 districts serve fewer than 500 students (Snapshot, 1994-95). Although making up a majority of districts, small and rural schools serve only twenty percent of the state's students. However, that statistic translates into 734,000 students needing to be educated. A growing proportion of students in small and rural school districts are minority.

A glance at some areas of the state where the rapid growth of minority populations is a new phenomena may illustrate the extent of demographic change expected by the year 2000. In the fifteen counties of the South Plains (the Panhandle), the Anglo population is expected to decrease 1.4 %, while that of African Americans to increase by 17.3%, Hispanics by 25.7% and Others by

22.9%. In the nineteen counties of West Central Texas (generally the area north from Abilene to the Red River) the Anglo population is expected to decrease 1.7%, African Americans to increase by 34.8%, Hispanics by 27.6% and Others by 22.5%. Finally, in the ten rural counties of central Texas located east of the Austin-San Antonio corridor, the Anglo population is expected to increase by 11.5%, African Americans by 16.9%, Hispanics by 36.9% and Others by 36.5%. In terms of absolute numbers, the largest increase in population in all three regions will be among Hispanics (Texas Area Facts, 1994).

While this population shift has immediate impact on educational programs and personnel, it also has significant implications for the politics of local school district governance. Inevitably, school boards long dominated by Anglos will have to be reconstituted to more clearly reflect the racial and ethnic compositions of their communities. This study examines four rural and small school districts where that process of school board change has been attempted.

Selecting school board members. School board member in Texas are selected in one of three ways: at-large, at-large by position or place or by single-member districts. The most commonly used method is to elect school board members at-large or at large by position or place. In 1995, nine hundred and nine Texas school districts used this method to select board members. School board elections are nonpartisan and are held annually. It is customary for multiple seats to be available. In an at-large election, candidates who have filed for election to the available seats on the board are listed alphabetically on the ballot. All qualified voters in the district cast their ballot for one candidate and the candidates with the highest numbers of votes are elected. Election at-large by position or place is similar to the straight at-large election process with the exception that each seat on the board has a number and candidates file for a specific numbered board position. The candidate with the highest number of votes for each available position are elected. Although at-large voting schemes have come under increasing attack recently for their impact on minority voters, the original purpose was to impose community-wide accountability on relected officials (Engstrom & McDonald, 1986). This value is still widely held by many rural residents.

One hundred and twenty one Texas school districts use single-member district arrangements to chose board members. Under a single-member district election system, candidates must physically reside in a specific geographic area of the school district and only voters who also reside within the boundaries of the single-member district are eligible to vote on candidates wishing to represent them. A single-member district election system may be adopted by the board itself by resolution or determined at an election initiated by the voters through a petition process. The law also specifies

that once a single-member district system is adopted, at least 70% of the board (five of the seven board members) must be elected in this manner, with the other two members elected at large. Boards may opt for either a 5/2 split between single-member districts and at-large election, or to elect all seven members by single-member districts. The single-member district election system is designed to insure that all interests in the school district have an opportunity to be represented on the board.

Neither election of school board members at-large or by single-member districts is without drawbacks. At-large elections, which theoretically emphasize community wide accountability for board members, reduce the chances of minorities being elected. Minority candidates are rarely able to garner significant political support from Anglos or to off-set Anglo voters with sufficient minority voters to win election. Consequently, at-large voting arrangements have been prime targets for litigation by minority voters seeking to increase their representation on governing boards of all types (Engstrom, 1985; Guinier, 1995). Single-member district systems are often proposed as solution the the dilution of minority votes inherent in the at-large election system. But the law requires that the boundaries of single-member districts must be "compact and contiguous and...as nearly as practicable of equal populations." (T.E.C. 11.05[d]). In communities large enough to have identifiable minority residential patterns, this requirement can be met. But in smaller communities and in rural areas without well defined minority residential patterns, the task of drawing reasonable single-member districts can be almost impossible.

The 1995 session of the Texas legislature provided school districts with an alternative to a single member districts system. The legislature authorized the board of directors of any independent school district that elects its members at-large or at-large by position or place to use cumulative voting. Cumulative voting had been adopted in other states to elect members of local governing boards, including school districts, and implemented in several Texas school districts as a result of legal action brought under the Federal Voting Rights Act (Brischetto, 1995). The procedure is simple and easy to understand. In the election of school board members at-large, each voter has a number of votes equal to the number of positions to be filled at the election. The voter may concentrate his or her votes on a single candidate or distribute them among all candidates as desired. Those candidates receiving the highest number of votes win. Communities are thus able to retain election at-large for local school board members, while at the same time to improve opportunities for minority representation. Since the election of school officials at-large appears to be an important issue in many rural communities, cumulative voting would seem to be a reasonable solution in small districts with a growing minority population.

Review of research on cumulative voting. Technically, cumulative voting is a form of semiproportional representation. Semi-proportional and proportional voting processes are designed to counteract the winner-take-all effect of at-large and single member district elections. However, they represent a very small sample of the electoral arrangements in the United States and are limited to local election jurisdictions. Proportional and semi-proportional election arrangements permit representation of minority interests on governing boards, normally in relation to their numbers in the electorate. The advantages of these systems lie in the avoidance of the need for drawing "gerrymandered" electoral district boundaries and in the improved representativeness of governing bodies. On the other hand, proportional and semi-proportional election systems can produce candidates with a "parochial" outlook and may result in the election of "extremists" who would stand little or no chance of election under at-large or single-member district arrangements (Weaver, 1984). At-large and single member district election systems remain by far the most frequently used method of selecting public officials at all levels of American government.

Cumulative voting is hardly an innovation in American politics. It was used for over a century to select members of the Illinois General Assembly and is used extensively in selecting Boards of Directors for major corporations. The State of Illinois adopted cumulative voting in 1870 to help overcome the effects of sectionalism and bitterness from the Civil War. Under the arrangement, cumulative voting took place in three member districts. Voters could cast all three votes for a single candidate or one and one-half votes for each of two candidates or one vote for three candidates. Most legislative districts tended to elect one minority party and two majority party representatives. The scheme allowed minority Republicans in the southern part of the state and minority Democrats in the northern counties levels of representation they would not have experienced under a single-member district arrangement. Cumulative voting proved to be successful and it remained in place until 1980, when voters replaced it with a single-member voting scheme coupled with the reduction in the size of the state legislature (Blair, 1960; Groffman, 1982; and Weaver, 1984). Cumulative voting arrangements have also been used to elect officials in muncipalities in New Mexico, Illinois and Alabama (Engstrom & Barrilleaux, 1990), in Worcester County, Maryland (Brischetto, 1995) and in school districts in Chilton County, Alabama, Sisseton, South Dakota and Lockhart, Texas (Cole, Taebel & Engstrom, 1990).

Research by Cole, Taebel and Engstrom (1990), Engstrom and Barrilleaux (1991) and Cole and Taebel (1992) further supports the use of cumulative voting. Their work indicates that voters appear to have little problem using or understanding cumulative voting; that minority voters, especially Hispanics, tend to utilize the system by "plumping" their votes behind a particular

candidate; that the initial disapproval of the system by Anglo voters tends to diminish with use; and that cumulative voting appears to be effective in maintaining minority office holders over time.

Brischetto has examined the impact of cumulative voting on elections in several small cities and school districts in west and north west Texas in May of 1995. In each case, the local jurisdiction adopted cumulative voting as settlement to litigation initiated by the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Exit polling of more than 4,000 voters in 16 jurisdictions found that:

- Voting for candidates seemed to be polarized along racial lines, although polarization was more pronounced between African-American and White voters than between Hispanic and Whites.

- Cumulative voting was effective in electing minority candidates, but only in jurisdictions where a "threshold of exclusion" was exceeded. The threshold of exclusion is the proportion of votes that any group of voters must exceed in order to elect a candidate of their choice and is calculated by one divided by one more than the number of seats to be filled (1/[1+n]). Thus, in an election with four seats available, the threshold of exclusion is 20% (1/[1+4])

- Cumulative voting was not rejected by White voters, although a sizeable number, 24%, expressed doubt that the system was fair. The system was overwhelmingly endorsed by African American voters (9 in 10) and Hispanic voters (8 in 10).

Eight independent school districts were included in this study. Minority candidates won school board seats in Atlanta, Morton and Rotan, but lost in Andrews, Denver City, Dumas, Friona and Stamford. In two of the districts where minorities won election, the percentage of minority voters exceeded the threshold of exclusion. In none of those where minorities lost was the threshold even closely approached. Surprisingly, in all of the districts where minorities won election in 1995, Anglo incumbants defeated minority challengers or Anglo incumbants ran unopposed in 1996. In none of the districts where minorities lost in 1995 were they successful in 1996. Brischetto's conclusion that "the jury is still out..." on the usefulness of cumulative to combat minority vote dilution is appropriate (1995, pg. 354).

The Study. The numbers tell us a great deal about the impact of cumulative voting, but they also leave much unsaid. The purpose of this study is to get behind the numbers by sampling the reactions of superintendents and board members; to understand, as Seidman puts it, "the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience." (Seidman, 1991, pg. 3). To accomplish this purpose four small, rural school districts with experience in the selection of school board members through cumulative voting were selected. Three of the districts are in Texas and the fourth in eastern New Mexico. Of the Texas districts, one is situated in the South Plains; one in West Central Texas; and one east of the Austin-San Antonio Corridor. Two of the districts had used cumulative voting to elect school board members at least once prior to May 1995, and two were using it for the first time. The districts ranged in enrollment from 3860 students to 478. Each district had a minority enrollment of at least 33%. The four school districts included in the study are described below.

Central Texas Consolidated Independent School District is the largest district in the study. It is located in a rural county just east of the Austin-San Antonio corridor. The district enrolls 3860 students, 47% of whom are Anglo, 45% Hispanic and 8% African American. Economically disadvantaged students comprise 49.7% of the population. Central Texas Consolidated has experienced student growth of over 15% for the past five years.The superintendent has served the district four years. The board consists of seven members, five of whom are elected by single member district and two at-large by cumulative voting. Three of the board members are Hispanic, two elected from single member districts and one at-large. Minorities have served on the board in the past. The current method of selecting board members was implemented in 1990.

Lee Municipal School District is located in eastern New Mexico about 100 miles west of Lubbock, Texas. The district enrolls 3048 students, 52.7% of whom are Hispanic, 44.9% Anglo and 2.4% African American. Enrollment has fluctuated over the last five years due to economic problems, especially in the oil industry. The major employers in the community are oil field and agriculture related and unemployment runs at about 9% annually. Municiapal population is about 9,000. The superintendent has been in the district since 1991. A board of five members govern the district, elected at large by cumulative voting. One board member is Hispanic but is not the first minority to serve on the board. She was originally appointed in 1992 to fill out the term of an Hispanic board member who had served

on the board for eighteen years. The district adopted cumulative voting in 1993 as settlement to litigation seeking a change to single member districts, which are required in New Mexico school districts with more than 16,000 population.

Salt Independent School District is located in a rural county in the Texas Panhandle. The student enrollment of 736 is 62% Hispanic, 28% Anglo and 10% African American. Over 75% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged. The district has experienced a 9.1% decline in enrollment in the last five years. Other than farming and ranching, there is no significant economic activity in the district or the county. The superintendent has served the school district since 1983. A board of seven govern the school district. Two board members are minority, an African American woman originally appointed to the board in 1987 and an Hispanic man, elected in 1995 through cumulative voting. The board has had a minority member since the early 1970's.

Double Mountain Independent School District lies in West Central Texas between Lubbock and Abilene. The district is the smallest in the study, with 478 students. Ethnic distribution is 56% Anglo, 36% Hispanic and 8% African American. Thirty nine percent of the students are economically disadvantaged. Over the last five years enrollment has declined 8.5%. The community serves surrounding ranches and there is one manufacturing concern which employs many of the residents. The superintendent has been in the district since 1994. Of the seven board members, one is Hispanic, elected through cumulative voting in 1995. He is the first minority board member in the district.

Data for the study was gathered through structured interviews with superintenents and board members in the four districts. A series of two interviews were scheduled with each superintendent. A single interview of slightly longer duration was conducted with the minority members of each board and with the longest serving board member. Follow up telephone contact with interviewees occurred where needed. Additionally, school district and Texas Education Agency documents were consulted and a review of the literature on cumulative voting was completed.

Interviews with Superintendents. Five themes run consistently through the interviews with school superintendents:

• Single member districts were perceived as divisive and impracticable for these small communities. Cumulative voting presented a reasonable alternative that permitted the districts to maintain the at-large voting system which appears to be so important to them.

• Superintendents perceived little difficulty in integrating newly elected minority members to the board.

• Although newly elected minority board members may voice a strong position on one or two identifiable minority issues, on all other issues coming before the board superintendent's perceived them voting and acting as other board members.

Superintendents confined their role in the transition to cumulative voting to providing information to the board and to conducting public meetings to inform voters once the decision was made.

• Superintendents believed that cumulative voting had no appreciable impact on the operation of the school district or on the functioning of the school board.

Cumulative voting preferred. Superintendents interviewed for the study were unanimous in their belief that cumulative voting was preferable to single member districts. Even the superintendent of Central Texas CISD, five of who's board members are elected by single member districts, expressed the same opinion. Generally, there were two reasons for this preference. First, was the difficulty of subdividing a small community in single member districts where no readily defined minority housing patterns were present. As the superintendent of Salt ISD put it, "...it was going to be nearly impossible to find three precincts that would be predominantly minority to ensure that they get a place. We're just all intermingled...." The superintendent of Double Mountain ISD expressed the same view. His district worked with a demographer on a preliminary study of the feasibility of using single member districts. The demographer's findings were that the district "...could not do a lot of districting without gerrymandering because we don't really have what you would call and isolated minority here...." A second motive behind the selection of a cumulative voting system was that school boards are wary of repeating the conflict they perceived in other local governmental jurisdictions who had adopted single member districts. Describing his district's reason to retain at-large elections, the superintendent of Lee Municipal School District noted that "...the people of the community [did] not want districting because they had already gone through

this situation with the city. The city is districted, so is the local hospital...they had also seen other school districts [with] a lot of dissension going on...because of people being elected who did not have a mandate from the community to serve. They may have had a mandate from a segment of town, but in some cases it caused [problems.]" The former President of the Board explained the decision this way:

> ...philosophically the entire board of the time agreed that it (single member districts) would lower the turn out ...if we districted, it would lower interest in the election and it would probably divide the board to a degree if [members] were elected from individual districts....We also know how small we are and in small communities we felt that it was detrimental and we sincerely believed this. We sincerely believed it would hurt the district.

It might be noted that Lee Municipal School District holds millage and school board elections at the same time. It is therefore important for these board member try to sustain high voter turn out to give the tax levy a better chance of passing. Lee Minicipal School District Board members felt strongly enough about their position that they oppossed the suit seeking imposition of single member districts. Since the population of the city was below the level at which New Mexico law imposes single member districts, cumulative voting was accepted as an alternative.

In Double Mountain ISD, which moved to cumulative voting without controversy, the superintendent contrasted the relative peace of the 1995 school board election with the acrimony of elections for city council seats. He is convinced the board made the correct decision.

Integrating newly elected minority board members. From the superintendent's view, there has been little difficulty in integrating newly elected minority school board members. The reasons for this may have nothing to do with cumulative voting. In all four districts, minority members elected through cumulative voting were known quantities. All had been active in the schools prior to election. In Central Texas CISD, the newly elected member had been active on district committees and in parent organizations. In Lee Municipal School District the member elected through cumulative voting had been appointed to the board a year earlier to serve out an unexpired term. At the time of her election, she was serving as Secretary of the Board. In Salt ISD the successful candidate had run once before for the board, nearly defeating an Anglo incumbent under the straight at-large system. Moreover, with an African American woman holding a seat on the board since 1987, the idea of a minority board member was hardly new. In Double Mountain ISD the

first minority member to serve on the board had been active in school affairs and had three daughters graduate from Double Mountain High School. Although acknowledging that there was some tension at the first two or three meetings of the board last spring, the superintendent now describes him as "...one of the tribe. He is just a board member like anyone else. He expresses himself, he does not always vote with the majority but he doesn't always vote with the minority either. He's his own man and can make up his own mind...." There were really few "surprises" for either incumbent board members or superintendents growing out of the election of these minority candidates.

Minority member/minority issues. The impression of the superintendents who were interviewed was that minority board members brought no special issue to the board table and for the most part voted and behaved like "typical" school board members. However, further questioning revealed that each of the minority members had certain issues about which they seemed to have particularly strong feelings. These issues include increasing employment of minority teachers, communication with non-English speaking parents and closing the achievement gap between Anglo and minority students. In Central Texas CISD Hispanic board members are concerned with recruiting more minority teachers and on closing the learning gap. The CISD superintendent:

> We are working through a minority recruitment plan to try to achieve the goal of having a faculty and staff to more equally reflect the make up of our community and our student body and so there is constant pressure and oversight to see that we are trying to achieve that goal...And there is still that gap, we have been closing that gap, but there is still a distinct gap in this district....between Anglo students and others. We do hear concern expressed from the minority representation about that gap....

In Lee Municipal School District the minority member is

> ....the first one to speak out and remind [us] that we have non-English speaking parents out there and that communication that goes on...needs to be in Spanish as well as English; she's also the first one [to] emphasize that we need to keep before us the court goal of hiring more minority [teachers]. She is also, I would say, the most sensitive board member to the need of...looking for more [and] better ways to bridge the communication gap between the home and the school.

The superintendent in Double Mountain ISD describes the interests of the newly elected board member as revolving around "...the academic program and the academic quality of the program that we offer." He also perceives this board member as sharing "...the same philosophy as this board has" in regard to hiring employees---to get the best person available regardless of race.
Over in Salt ISD, the superintendent describes the newly elected Hispanic board member as "understanding, concerned, [wants to] do things the way they are suppossed to be done; he does have a concern for kids and...has never come in and criticized anything that was done..." He was unable to identify any specific issues regarding programs or services where this board member took a position that could be identified a representing an minority viewpoint.

Role of the superintendent. In all of the districts studied, the superintendent publicly assumed an advisory role in the transition to cumulative voting. This means providing advice and recommendations to the board, transmitting legal opinion from school district counsel to the school board and ensuring that the public was informed about the change. The superintendent was the person most often in contact with legal counsel and the one through whom legal opinions, advice or recommendations were transmitted. Once the decision was made, superintendents organized public information campaigns and were the district officials responsible for explaining cumulative voting to the public. Once the minority board member had been elected, it was the superintendent who took his or her orientation to the board in hand. In all of the districts, the public posture of the superintendent on this issue was professional neutrality.

Impact of cumulative voting. Superintendents of the four school districts believe that cumulative voting has had no appreciable impact on the school district or the school board. It has been, says one superintendent "...kind of a ho-hum deal." In Salt ISD the superintendent believes that cumulative voting has had no significant impact on the district. As justification for this judgment he points to the fact that there has been a minority member of the board for several years and that the candidate elected in 1995 "probably would have been elected" under the straight at-large arrangement. The superintendent of Lee Municipal, which also has had minority representation in the past, holds much the same view. "...I look at the candidates that were elected this last time around...and I can't imagine the voting coming out any different had we just had at-large voting...." The superintendent of Central Texas CISD believes that, while cumulative voting has increased minority representation on the board, it has had one deleterious side effect. It has effectively disenfranchised the African American voters in his district. "...[T]he Black community ...is so insignificant [in number] by comparison to the other two that this system possibly guarantees that there will never be another Black representative on the board unless one is

appointed to finish out a term...." Since the district traditionally had a "Black" seat on the board under the straight at-large voting system, cumulative voting has been a step backward for this population.

Interviews with board members. Four themes run consistently through the interviews with school board members in these four school districts. These are:

- The views of Anglo board members interviewed coincided very closely with the views of superintendents on the issue of cumulative voting.

- The decision of minority board members to run for the board appears to be grounded in personal reasons and motivations rather than in organized minority political activity.

- Newly elected minority school board members claimed to encounter little or no racial hostility in their contact with other board members.

- Minority members semed to be well integrated into their boards and, with minor exceptions, to view board issues from a community perspective.

Congruence of views. Not too unexpectedly, there was general agreement between superintendents and veteran Anglo board members about the issue of cumulative voting. They were unanimous in their rejection of single member districts as divisive and impractical for their districts. They believed that minority members had become integral parts of the school board without much difficulty. They perceived little or no division on the board along ethnic lines and were agreed that cumulative voting had little effect on the board or school district. While interviews with newly elected minority board members hint that things may not be quite as peaceful as incumbent board members believe, there appears to be a surprising low level of hostility expressed.

Decision to run for the board. The decision of minority candidates to run for election to the school board seems to grow out of personal motives rather than to result from any organized minority political activity. Indeed, the decision to become a candidate seems to reflect the process which Skerry (1993), in his study of Mexican American politics in San Antonio and Los Angeles, calls

"friends and neighbors politics." Friends and neighbors politics is grounded in "the face-to-face, primary group ties that loom so large in the day-to-day lives of Mexican Americans...." (pg. 132). It is reflective of the close familial and social group ties that delineate many aspects of Mexican American life in south Texas. Its essence is captured in Skerry's description of how Mexican American candidates are selected for local political office---by a group of friends sitting around a kitchen table trying to talk one of their number into running for office. Political activity is generated from primary group relationships rather than controlled by an organized political "machine" operated by an elite. Friends and neighbors politics is grassroots politics at its simplest.

In Double Mountain ISD the newly elected Hispanic board member described his decision to run for the board as a long standing goal frustrated by an uncertain work schedule. When that obstacle had been overcome, he ran for the board. The motivation behind the desire to become a board member was to "see how it [the board] worked" and to find out "what we have to do for the kids." Although he focuses his comments on his own personal reasons for running for the board and gives major credit to his wife in pushing him to run, it should be noted that a brother-in-law and a close friend were elected to the city council at the same election. This community was also the scene of an organized get out the vote campaign run by the Southwest Voters Education Project, a San Antonio based interest group active in assisting Hispanic candidates to be elected to local governing boards. Timing may have played a major role in this situation.

In Central Texas ISD the Hispanic woman elected at-large by cumulative voting describes herself before her election to the board as not overly active in school affairs, but "just a mom." She was initially recruited by a group of Hispanic mothers who approached her and asked her to run for the board. "It was about a dozen ladies, mothers all [with] kids in school....They felt that I would be a good addition [to the board] and they supported me. Their husbands supported me, their families did and we all went out [and worked]." This woman, who is in her second term on the board, has garnered the largest single number of votes of any candidate for the board in both her election and reelection campaigns.

Salt ISD's Hispanic board member's decision to run for the board may have been prompted in part by his own business interests. New to the community and married to the elementary school librarian, this candidate had little name recognition on his first run. However, running the second time at an election where no incumbent was on the ballot, he won easily with both Anglo and Hispanic support. Since being elected to the board, this person has begun to work full time in an urban area several hundred miles from home and will probably not be a factor in board operations

much longer.

The board member in Lee Municipal Schools was recruited to apply to fill out an unexpired term on the school board. In this instance, she was approached by business and personal friends, predominantly Anglo. Her application was successful, primarily because the board at the time was looking for a "qualified" Hispanic candidate, and she was subsequently elected to the position in her own right. This particular board member's experience points up one of the pitfalls of viewing minority candidates as representing a unified constituency. In our conversation she referred repeatedly to conflict within the Hispanic community between a coalition made up on one side of those with long histories in the community and those who are newly arrived from Mexico and on the other side of middle class, professional Hispanics with little fluency in the Spanish language or a deep seated allegiance to Mexican culture. Although she is a teacher and has lived with her family in the community for eighteen years, both her original appointment to the board and her subsequent election were actively opposed by the leadership of LULAC, which considered her to be "un-representative" of the Hispanic community.

Ethnic hostility. Only one of the newly elected minority board member reported encountering any hostility from his new colleagues. He describes feeling a little "different" at his first board meeting and catching signals from some board members that he might not belong. He had, after all, defeated a popular and long serving incumbent and was the first Hispanic to serve on the board. But he believes that whatever hostility there was has subsided and that after two years he is accepted as just another board member. No other minority board member interviewed reported encountering hostility from either the board or the community at large.

Integration to the board. The newly elected minority board members reported themselves as being accepted by their board colleagues and expressed a community-wide perspective on most issues which confronted them. The only notable differences between minority board members and their majority colleagues centered on recruiting more minority teachers, counselors and administrators, concern for the achievement gap between Anglo and minority children and providing bilingual communication between the school and the home. On most other issues they expressed positions indistinguishable from what could be expected of any small town school board member. The comments of one of the minority members of the Central Texas ISD, whose board is split ethnically with four Anglos and three Hispanics, are instructive:

> We are very lucky, we have a very good board. I don't think any one of us has any

> kind of a personal agenda, and if they do, they manage to work it real well into the regular system. Questions [get] answered in an open, above-board method. There is no personality conflict type things involved. One of the biggest things I learned when I first got on this board is that we agree and disagree and we do "go at it" behind closed doors. That does happen because sometimes that is the best way to iron things out. But when we leave that room we are in support of what ever the decision was that the majority came to.

Disagreements may occur, but are dealt with behind closed doors. The board presents a unified front to the public.

Discussion. Perhaps the most that can be said of cumulative voting at this time is that it has had limited impact on the ethnic composition of local school boards in small districts with growing minority populations. What the long-term impact of the system will be is unclear. Results to date are mixed. In some districts minorities have been elected to school boards for the first time. In others, minority representation was either maintained or augmented. In yet another instance, the growth in representation for one minority group has led to the exclusion of another. It is too early to tell if cumulative voting is the answer to the dilution of minority votes or whether some other, more directly proportional method of distributing representation must be sought.

On a related issue, it seems clear that minority board members quickly become integrated into the functioning of the school board. Only one of the minority board members interviewed reported any feelings of hostility and those, according to his own statement, quickly dissipated. One may speculate about causes for this integration. It may be that there are as yet too few minority board members to make a noticeable impact on these districts. It may also be that the minority candidates elected were well enough known to their colleagues that socialization occurred naturally. The fact that three of the districts studied had minority members in the past is also a contributing factor. Continuing a minority presence on the board was simply "no big deal."

Finally, while cumulative voting may have a limited albeit positive impact on minority school board representation, it has not seemed to have had any influence in ameliorating race relations in the communities studied. Both superintendents and board members were anxious to portray their communities as racially peaceful. But occasional glimpses of a different reality came through. Anglo dissatisfaction with minority representatives in single member districts is being voiced in one of the communities. References to deeply felt intra-ethnic conflict surfaced in another while in

a third, the superintendent spoke at length about the divisions between African American, Anglo and Hispanic student groups in his small high school. Changing the way in which school board members are elected appears to have little immediate impact on inter-racial relations.

Conclusion. It is too early to say with any degree of confidence what the long-term impact of cumulative voting on the ethnic composition of school boards in rural communities with growing minority populations will be. Brischetto's belief the "the jury is still out" on this issue seems more than justified. Indeed, since cumulative voting is in fact racially neutral in that all voters cast the same unweighted number of ballots, it may have no real long-term impact at all. Authors such as Guinier, Engstrom and others may be correct in their contention that the traditional "winner-take-all" American electoral process is no longer relevant to a pluralistic and multiethnic society and should give way to a more truly proportional electoral scheme. But this is a decision for society as a whole and not just school districts. Until that issue is decided, representative governing bodies, including local school boards, will have to do what they can to insure effective representation for all members of their communities.

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